

Date: May 1, 1974

Place: 2115 Sherman, Evanston, Illinois.

Interview with: Milton Harper

Observations: Interview later than originally scheduled so as to include an interview with the informant's wife. Mr. Harper greeted me at the door, and we retired to the same verandas in the first interview. The purpose of the interview was twofold: First, to find out if ETHS program included vocational courses; second, to develop the character of Mr. Beardsley. Specifically, was he the dignified classicist originally described to me?

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Q. Mr. Harper, during my initial inquiries into the school system, I was informed by another graduate student of controversy surrounding certain aspects of the high school. Last time I mentioned the bond issue. One of the reasons given for the repeated failures of bond issues was that the school, to many, seemed elitist, offering only a classical education without the supposed "frills" of extracurricular activities or clubs. Do you think that that is a fair representation?

A. I don't think so. The common belief on the high school -- and the accuracy of this could be questioned -- but the common belief on the school was that it was a good school. New Trier, Evanston, and Oak Park were all close. They were athletic rivals, and on a par in many ways.

Evanston had the full range of athletic activities. Not swimming, I don't think. In fact I don't know if they have swimming even now. (Asked Mrs. Harper if the school had a pool. Answer affirmative.) But they had football, baseball, basketball. Now I didn't do any of those sports, but I'm sure that they had them.

Q. Do you recall the names of any of the athletes?

A. No, since I didn't participate I really can't say who did.

Q. The last time we talked about academic courses. Did the school have any vocational courses, such as typing, home ec. or shop?

A. Let's see, they did have both typing and...shorthand. In fact, Mr Beardsley married the typing teacher. He had been a bachelor for many years. But that was after I had left.

Q. Shop?

A. No, not in the high school that I can recall. I do know that in the seventh and eighth grades the boys took a course called manual training and the girls took cooking. I'm sure that they have vocational courses now, but did you mean did they train you to be an auto mechanic?

Q. Yes.

A. No, I don't think that the school had courses like that.

Q. Did any students or parents either complain or suggest that wood working or metal working shop courses might be appropriate?

A. Not that I can recall. I would have enjoyed a wood working shop, because I still can't use tools correctly. But I don't think that anyone asked that they be taught in school.

Q. Last time I noticed that in the entire class picture there was only a single black student. A black woman. I wanted to comment before.

A. Yes, that was Elizabeth Hill. She went on to become a doctor



and headed the staff at the community hospital on the west side.

Q. Do you recall there being many blacks in school at that time?

A. Yes, there were plenty of blacks in the school. And never to my knowledge was there any sort of racial sentiment pro or con. But there were plenty of blacks, and everybody seemed to get along.

Q. I noticed that she was the only black in the picture.

A. She was apparently the only one to show up. In fact, about 25% of the class didn't. I don't know why.

Q. After high school, did you ever hear what some of the black students did?

A. After high school? Just like for all students. In fact, I could just as easily answer that for all students. Some went to college. None set the world on fire, if that's what you're looking for. None ever attained great prominence, black or white.

Q. Last time you mentioned the enrollment of the senior class, but I don't think that I noted it.

A. 108

Q. Everybody I've talked to has mentioned, at some point or another, the principal, Mr. Beardsley. First of all, do you recall his first name?

A. No, but I can tell you what some people called him! Mr. Beardsley was a very neat man, a meticulous sort of a dresser, a, well-groomed, and, um, sleek.

Q. What about his disposition? Stern? Relaxed?

A. He was dignified. He didn't or you didn't monkey around. At the same time, he didn't exude any pompousness, or maybe just a bit, but it wasn't overbearing. He wasn't unpleasant to be around. I remember one thing that he used to do. Each month, I believe, we used to get a report card. It might have been less often, but I think it was each month. We would all file into the auditorium...

Q. Class or School?

A. School. We would all file into the auditorium, and Mr. Beardsley would be sitting on the stage with the carton of report cards. One by one we would go up and get them. Now I don't know if it was because we were sitting in alphabetical order -- I don't remember if we were, but he always called out each name. I don't know why he did that, but I always thought that his reason was that he wanted to learn everybody's name. I was rather glad that he did it. I thought that it was a nice thing to do.

I don't know if I told you, but Mr. Beardsley married the typing and shorthand teacher. I don't recall her name.

Q. I think that you mentioned that last time. But coming back to Mr. Beardsley and the report cards, while you and others appreciated his efforts on your behalf, were there others who thought less highly of him?

A. I have no recollections of any disruptions. There was certainly nothing like there is now. I'm not suggesting that we were docile, but there was no window-breaking or delinquency.



Q. Would you call Mr. Beardsley a snob?

A. Mr. Beardsley was elegant. He may have appeared perhaps unapproachable, but he was approachable. I never had any reason to spend much time with him, or to have any other contact with him other than those meetings when he handed out report cards. And I suppose that looking at him some people might consider him to be somewhat stand-offish. He certainly wasn't the Johnny Carson-type. I thought that he did an excellent job at the high school. And I think that most of the parents appreciated the way he ran the school. In fact, I don't recall anyone ever disparaging Mr. Beardsley, that is, any of the adults. Or at school, either, for that matter.

Q. Again, Mr. Harper, I don't want to back you into a corner, but did you do well at school?

A. I seem to recall doing well, or at least reasonably well. I was never an all "A" student -- far from it. If I had to give you an average, I guess it would be perhaps a "B". I don't know what it's like now, but then there didn't seem to be such concern with grades. No, we were concerned, but I don't think that we were so competitive. Anyway, there was never much discussion about grades at home, which I suppose is some sort of indicator.

Q. Was there some sort of honor roll?

A. There was, but I never made it. Oh, once or twice, maybe.

Q. One last question this time. Looking back, Mr. Harper, would you say -- or rather how would you consider your high school experience?

A. It was rather uneventful. I remember that there were a few exciting moments...

Q. Such as..

A. Oh, there once was a fire scare, but that proved to be a false alarm. But otherwise things ran smoothly. Now as I've said, I wasn't the socialite who participated in all sorts of after school athletics, so perhaps my experience isn't or wasn't as eventful as some others. But I liked much of the schoolwork, even if it was meaningless, like learning -- or not learning to speak French or German.

Now, did you want to speak to my wife?

Q. Just one final question. I don't think you've told me your occupation.

A. I'm retired now, but I used to work on the fringes of advertising.

Q. Fringes of advertising?

A. Yes, not long after that year in Northwestern.

Q. With an agency?

A. No, not with an agency. Just on the fringes. (seemed reluctant to go into greater detail than that)

